Crisis within a crisis? Foreigners in Athens and traces of transnational relations and separations

Published in: *Critical Times in Greece: Anthropological Engagements with the Crisis*, 2018. Dimitris Dalakoglou and Georgios Agelopoulos (eds). Routledge: Abingdon, Oxon, Routledge Studies in Anthropology Number 44, pp. 102-115.

Abstract

One aspect of the financial and then fiscal crisis in Athens was the simultaneous change in, and increase of, migration to the city. Their sheer numbers seemed to add to a pervasive sense of disproportion affecting the city. Of course, it is not the first time there has been a sudden arrival of large numbers of people from elsewhere in Athens: the 1920s was another notable moment, following the compulsory exchange of populations after the final breakup of the Ottoman Empire. There was also the 1990s, after the end of the Cold War. Both the city's past and present transnational relations leave their traces in the form that migration takes, and the way it is experienced here. The paper takes a brief look at some of those traces in order to explore how the city has been affected by changes in border regimes, changes in the way different parts of the world are entangled with one another.

Sarah Green, University of Helsinki

1960s Athens: cosmopolitan foreigners

Fifty years ago in 1965, Athens was a vibrant city, a cosmopolitan city, a city full of tensions, rumblings of revolution, or at least a sense that people were beginning to have enough of the right-wing rulers who had been helped into government by a consortium of international powers in the decade before – by the USA mostly, people believed. The US government was following the Truman Doctrine, trying to ensure strong, conservative government to prevent the communists getting in.[1]

It was not only the Americans, of course; others had an interest in Greece, whether that was based on cold war ideologies, romantic ideals borne of reading classical history, or realpolitik. It was an edgy space in 1965, one that had been built, in its modern guise, on a tangle of partly contradictory, and thoroughly cosmopolitan, aims and ambitions. Bastéa

[1] Clogg (1986: 137-140)

(2000) has charted how the core architecture of Athens built during the 19th century reflects a mixture of transnational and nationalist ideals of what Greece and the Greeks should be. It would be interesting to ask, today, in the twenty-first century in the midst of crisis, whether those ideals, those dreams[2] of an Athens built upon dreams of a classical Athens, built upon dreams of a modern Athens - were ever realised in any meaningful sense. Yalouri (2001), who closely studied the variety of uses to which the Acropolis has been put, both symbolically and otherwise, also noted the strongly transnational influence on Athens, from the moment of Greek independence right up to the present day. Athens is a transnational city *par excellence* - which is to say that transnational political and economic interests have had exceptional levels of involvement in the way the city, and the Greek state which has located the headquarters of its government there, has developed over the decades.[3]

That international involvement, or interference some might say, continues today of course, even though the way in which the involvement has manifested itself is rather different now. Many have suggested the difference is generated by a neoliberal form of capitalism, one that has turned everything into a (consumer) choice.[4] Well, perhaps not quite everything: the exception is choice itself.[5] Not having any choice over the right to (consumer) choice seems a strange kind of compulsory freedom in a time of crisis – or at any time when people have no money, come to that.

Newcomers, conflict and the concept of crisis

That is jumping ahead in this story about the entanglement between Athens and its transnational connections and separations, in which I want to pay particular attention to how

[2] Gourgouris (1996) and Herzfeld (1986)
[3] The choice of Athens as the capitol of modern independent Greece in the 1830s was the result of ideas about classical Greece written by German and British classical scholars; the first interim government was located in Nafplion, the capitol of the Peloponnese region, which was a much more substantial city at the time than Athens, which Clogg describes as having been a 'dusty' and relatively small town (Clogg 1992: 46-9).
[4] Graeber (2011a)
[5] Strathern (1992: 183)

such connections and separations relate to the new people coming into the city just now, in the midst of what most have labelled the major economic crisis that has been affecting Athens since 2009. The world media have regularly reported scenes of conflict and the flaring up of apparent utter chaos between new arrivals to the city and the police, not to mention the conflicts between the new arrivals and the self-styled anti-migrant vigilantes who have joined Golden Dawn (Χρυσή Αυγή). It is easy to believe that many of these vigilantes joined Golden Dawn at least partly in order to have the moral right to beat the new foreigners to a pulp. This would be analogous, and incorporating analogous ambivalent and intricate social motivations, to the phenomenon of some young British men becoming football fans in the 1980s partly in order to beat their team's opponent's fans to a pulp after each match (Armstrong 1998).

The combination of these images of conflict and chaos coming out of Athens – anti-austerity uprisings and demonstrations on the one hand, and battles with new arrivals from troubled places on the other – has done a considerable amount towards generating the sense that a major crisis is underway in Athens. I will return to this point later. Suffice it to note here that Roitman (2014) suggests that 'crisis' is a concept that has to be taken for granted in order for people to be 'in' it (that is, in crisis), and also so that people can analyse what caused 'it' (that is, the crisis). This means, Roitman suggests, that the concept itself (crisis) becomes an unanalysed blind spot, it forms the backdrop within which everything occurs, without actually thinking through the assumptions that are embedded in the concept itself – assumptions that might actually contribute towards creating what it is describing. Roitman does not deny the seriousness of the experiences that people described as being 'in crisis' find themselves (in her case, she was studying the financial crisis in the USA). Rather, she is simply asking the question: what difference does it make to call these experiences and events a crisis?

Roitman's focus is on those who have the power to create the labels, and what effects those labels have. In thinking about Athens 'in crisis' my focus is rather different: it is on the people who are living with this label, and who accept it as a reasonable account of what they are experience. What does it mean to them? And the reason that this is important is the way that the concept both links Athens with, and disconnects it from, other places. I will return to this.

Foreigners before the migrants

In any case, the streets of Athens did not look anything like 'crisis' in 1965, and certainly not in terms of newcomers to the city. Fifty years ago, Athens was home to a small but diverse population of those kinds of foreigners who do not think of themselves as migrants, but some other category of non-Greeks living in Greece, either permanently, temporarily, or for only part of the year.[6] Not that *anyone* could really have thought of themselves as an immigrant to Greece in those days: it was not until the 1990s that the Greek state developed clear or workable immigration policies or migration legislation concerning 'foreigners' (i.e. people who were not in some way defined as being Greek).[7] Consequently, as the legal status of 'immigrant' did not really exist in Greek law in the 1960s, people in Athens were either Greek or they were foreign. There was no added legal, social or moral nuance to that distinction, that sharpness conveyed by the term 'migrant' – or even worse, 'illegal migrant'.[8] That is important to remember: in contemporary territorial politics, migration is a legally defined status first and foremost; migration may become a social issue

[6] My own family were amongst them in 1963 and 1964, but by 1965 we had moved to the island of Lesvos, returning to Athens from 1971 to 1974.
[7] Karyotis (2012: 394-5)
[8] Bridget Anderson provides an excellent analysis of the negative moral assessment implied in the term 'migrant' (Anderson 2013).

and one that politicians argue about, but neither can happen before migration actually exists as a legal status.[9]

It is also worth mentioning here that not liking foreigners is not the same as not liking migrants. The implication of the word 'migrant', at least in Greece at the moment, involves a claim to some kind of belonging to the *place* – the land of Greece – in a way that is not implied by the word 'foreigner' (ξένος). While a migrant is clearly different from someone born in the place, they are nevertheless intending to stay, and there is an implied break with the place from which they came. In contrast, and within this kind of conception, a foreigner can only ever be a visitor, and however many years s/he stays in the place, the belonging is to somewhere else. The Greek word for hotel, ξενοδοχείο, literally means a 'container for foreigners,' a place where foreigners are kept – which is to say, a container that is separate from where people who are not foreigners are located. Ultimately and axiomatically, foreigners belong elsewhere, so they have no claim over the Greeks' place. Migrants, on the other hand, are foreigners who either have a legal right to belong *here* (having moved from somewhere else), or who have every intention of staying here even if they do not have that legal right, and that changes things in important ways. As both Gourgouris (1996) and Herzfeld (1986) have noted, in the case of Greek nationalist rhetoric, the moral connection between the nation and the *exclusive* right to a geographical, physical location is intense. Within this kind of nationalist logic, it is possible to see no contradiction at all in being friendly towards foreigners, and even priding yourself on your hospitality towards foreigners (φιλοξενία – foreigner friendship), while also being hostile towards migrants.[10] The difference is a perceived difference in relationship with, and claims to, the land.

---

[9] Karyotis and Patrikios (2010); Triandafyllidou (2009)

[10] The whole issue of what 'foreigner' means in social terms in Greece has been discussed at length (and see especially Herzfeld 1991: 80-86). The key point of that debate for my purposes here is that hospitality establishes a clear moral and social division between the foreigner who is being treated well, and the host. The term 'migrant' (μετανάστης) implies a

In any case, in the 1960s, many of the non-Greek Athenian residents (the foreigners) were people who somehow felt a little uncomfortable in their own country, whether for social, political, economic or legal reasons: anti-Apartheid white South Africans; gay men; tax exiles; a variety of writers, poets, artists, and out of work actors who wanted to live cheaply. The lack of any coherent government policy about what to do about foreigners made it relatively easy to live there. Of course it was not an easy city, but it was easy enough to exist there as a foreigner without too many questions being asked. Athenians were used to these kinds of foreigners, transients who came and went, and who lived their lives largely separately from the Greek people of the city, though usually on friendly terms: a nod of the head, a polite hello in the coffee shop. There was not a great deal of interest on either side.

Even during the military regime of 1967-74, there was not much interest in these transient foreigners on the part of the regime. That included the poorer foreigners (of which there were very few in those days) as well as the more wealthy and educated political refugees and ex-patriots (who rarely classify themselves as migrants anyway, even when the legislation exists). The foreigners were really a matter of indifference to the Greek state in all senses of the word, as they did not really formally exist in bureaucratic terms.[11] So long as they were not committing crimes, and in particular, so long as they were not selling drugs or getting up to any other kind of behaviour defined as troublesome by the Greek police, the existence of foreigners in Athens remained formally unrecognised. They lived without the paperwork because it was not possible for them to actually have any paperwork. That placed them in

---

much less clear distinction in terms of rights to the *place*. Location is very important in this matter in Greece. As Herzfeld notes, a great deal of the concept of hospitality in Greece is addressed towards neighbours, when they visit the homes or events of the host.

[11] This is a different form of indifference than discussed by Herzfeld in his account of the ideology of bureaucracy – according to which people's differences have to be ignored in order to treat everyone equally: civil servants must strive to be indifferent to difference, as it were (Herzfeld 1992). What I am drawing attention to here is an indifference generated by the complete absence of a certain group of people from the bureaucratic system.

something of a legal grey zone, or a black hole even. This meant that if they did attract the attention of the authorities, they had almost no rights whatsoever, and accounts of brutality, especially during the period of the military junta, are common; but so long as foreigners did not get in the way of anybody powerful, life went on.[12]

1990s and the invention of migrants

It is difficult to imagine, in these days of the hyper-professionalization and securitization of migration, that such a 1960s world in which the laws were so unclear about such matters actually existed.[13] This all changed quite radically in Greece after 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union, which was followed by the downfall of the two other socialist governments in Europe, former Yugoslavia and Albania, both of which shared borders with Greece. At that point, the Greek government developed a series of new migration laws and policies, much of them written hastily and hardly discussed in parliament at all.[14] Politicians and journalists often suggested during that period that, for the first time in the country's history, Greece was having to deal with immigration rather than emigration. The majority of arrivals during the 1990s were from Albania, but there were many others from former Yugoslavia and other former Soviet areas as well.[15]

It is important to remember that the political changes in the neighbouring states was not all that was going on in terms of the geopolitics of migration in Greece during the 1990s. At exactly the same time (and not coincidentally), Greece was preparing to become a member of the EU's Schengen zone, which required Greece to be subject to Schengen regulations

[12] A different, but analogous, situation exists in Moscow for not-entirely-legal migrant workers who come there from different parts of the former Soviet Union (Reeves 2013). In that case, the workers were crossing state borders to get to Moscow that in the past did not belong to countries at all. Rather more darkly, the undocumented refugees who drown in their attempts to get to Greece are also people who, by definition, have no documents, and so they cannot be recognised by the state (Green 2010).
[13] Andersson (2014)
[14] Samatas (2003: 114)
[15] Swarts and Karakatsanis (2012)

concerning border controls. The first major law about immigration to contemporary Greece, the *Aliens, Immigrants and Refugees Law* (Law 1975/1991), was introduced in order to comply with Schengen requirements.[16] The way in which successive Greek governments have chosen to interpret these requirements, as many commentators from that time have noted, has been to regard migration as a security threat, and the new Greek laws and policies on immigration reflected that.[17] Samatas suggests that in fact, the Schengen accord embeds the perception of migration as a potentially criminal offence against which Schengen countries needed to protect themselves; and he also suggests that the regulations were seriously deficient in protecting human and civil rights in the building of what many have since called "Fortress Europe": a hardening of borders outside the Schengen area, while softening the borders within the area, in return for a fairly substantial rise in levels of surveillance over the people within the Schengen area. Samatas concludes that "securitisation prevails over human rights and civil liberties in Schengenland," (Samatas 2003: 153).

Whatever one may think about that conclusion, it is certainly the case that the sense of threat about the new arrivals rapidly spread in Greece during the 1990s, expressed particularly strongly in populist sentiments about the new arrivals, as Bakalaki (2003) has noted. In my own work on the Greek-Albanian border area in northwestern Greece, the re-opening of the border in the early 1990s also reopened mixed feelings about the relations and separations between the two sides since the end of the Greek civil war in 1949 (Green 2005: 218-34). Unlike the responses to the migrants in the urban centres, which were fairly starkly split between fear of, and hostility towards, the new arrivals from Albania (the majority) and strong defence of the rights of the immigrants (the minority, but vocal), in the border area,

[16] Baldwin-Edwards (1997); Samatas (2003)
[17] Karyotis (2012); Karyotis and Patrikios (2010); Swarts and Karakatsanis (2012); Swarts and Karakatsanis (2013)

there was a great deal more ambiguity and ambivalence in feelings about the Albanians and the Northern Epirots (Albanian citizens who were part of the Greek minority in Albania).

What went almost unnoticed in this quite intense and diverse debate was that suddenly, everybody in Greece was talking about immigrants, whereas before they had spoken of foreigners. The category 'immigrant' had been legally created in the historical moment during which major political changes around Greece's borders were occurring as a result of the end of the Cold War, leading to many arrivals from former socialist states in Greece; and EU requirements that implemented a fairly radical change in the definition and perception of migration into the Schengen area. The rather informal conditions of the 1960s, in which people came and went more or less without anyone in government creating a record of it, had become unthinkable. And as Ruben Andersson argues in *Illegality, Inc.,* which is an ethnographic study of migration through the Spanish north African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, the technical and infrastructural business of controlling borders once the legislation and policies were put in place became big business. The laws and policies, combined with the border control infrastructure, basically created a particular figure of the migrant, both as a migrant, and as being always suspect, both in terms of security and legality (Andersson 2014).

The 1920s arrival of the Asia Minor refugees: officially a return

There was much talk, in that heady post-socialist moment in the 1990s, of how Greece had never experienced in-migration to the country before, that this was a novel experience. For reasons I have just explained, and in strictly legal terms, that was true. However, this was not the first time that Greece had experienced the arrival of a large number of strangers all at once, and it was not the first time that Athens and its surrounding areas was strongly affected by such arrivals. As Renée Hirschon richly reported in her ethnography of Pireaus (the main port that serves Athens), *Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe* (1989), the port area was one amongst many areas in and around Athens that had experienced a huge influx of refugees

from Asia Minor in the 1920s, another period in Greek history that has been ascribed with the label 'crisis'. That was the period when the Greek word for 'refugees' (*πρόσφυγες*) began to carry particular weight and significance in the country. As Hirschon records on the first page of her ethnography, land was put aside for these refugees in the outskirts of Athens and in Piraeus.

Even though many of these people had never been to Greece before, and even though many even could not speak Greek, they were officially defined as 'coming home': Greek Orthodox peoples sent to Greece when the Ottoman empire, their former home, ceased to exist, as a place.[18] As Hirschon records, and unsurprisingly, Greece felt foreign to these newcomers, and they confronted significant levels of prejudice from the existing residents in Greece. In short, these people both regarded themselves as being foreigners, and they were regarded as such by the residents of Athens and Piraeus, too. To this day there are many Greeks who say that they can distinguish between someone who is from a 'dopia' (indigenous) family and one from a 'prosfigiki' (refugee) family. Officially, however, these people were returning to their 'homeland,' Greece; they were not migrants. And formally speaking, they were not refugees either; they were 'returnees,' Greeks returning to Greece. For the people involved, both those moving from former Ottoman territories and those already living in Greece, there were quite different understandings from the legal situation.[19]

Of course, this was also not the first time that there was a debate about who was a Greek. Bastéa notes,[20] as do both James Faubion and Michael Herzfeld in different ways,[21] that in the early period of the Greek state in the 19th century, there were heated disagreements

[18] See also Green (2010) for a more detailed discussion of what kind of 'return' this exchange of populations constituted.
[19] I discuss the epistemological shift in the relation between people and place that occurred between the late Ottoman and the creation of nation-based states in more detail in Green (2005: Chapter 4).
[20] Bastéa (2000: 21)
[21] Herzfeld (1986); Faubion (1993)

about who counted as a Greek and who did not, which was based as much on how recently people had moved to Greece, and what part they played in the war of Independence, as it did on any concepts of blood or soil. The 1920s arrivals were something of a repetition, then, of newcomers who are, to a greater or lesser degree, Greeks.

That 1920s period marked two things about the relation between Athens and migrants. The first is that it established a material, embodied link between the city and other parts of the world, as well as between the city and transnational organizations such as the League of Nations, which oversaw the compulsory movement of populations between Turkey and Greece.[22] And second, it established a social context in which strangers arrived in the city in very large numbers, all at once. The sheer quantity of people arriving in a short space of time was a major characteristic of the events during that period, and this question of quantity has been repeatedly discussed ever since.

That same question of quantity was also addressed in the 1990s, when people from neighbouring post-socialist countries arrived: and as noted, they were the first cohort of arrivals in large numbers who were legally classified as migrants and refugees, rather than returnees.

The 2000s: a sense of disproportion

The arrivals during the 2000s, who have also been described in terms of large quantities, were something else again. By the year 2000, the full range of regulations for compliance with Schengen had been put in place in Greece.[23] That was combined with the strong 'securitization' approach of successive Greek governments towards migration, and a lack of political will to provide adequate facilities or resources to newly arrived asylum

[22] Hirschon (2003)
[23] Samatas (2003: 141)

seekers and refugees.[24] Then the series of events in the Arab world, beginning with the US response to 9/11 in Afghanistan in 2001, and which led to repeated flights of people from troubled places, only increasing in intensity since 2011 when the so-called 'Arab Spring' began, has led, in 2015, to a perception that the sheer numbers of the new arrivals in Greece in general, and Athens in particular, is overwhelming.

An apparently crucial difference between the 1920s mass movement of populations and both the 1990s and the current period is that in the 1920s, the 'exchange' of populations between Greek and Turkish territories was carried out officially by transnational agencies who were following the policies established in the Lausanne Convention of 1923. And it is indeed the case that in the current period, there are no coordinated transnational policies that are intended to move populations from one place to another. Indeed, the virtual absence of any coordinated transnational efforts to deal with the humanitarian costs of the conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, and then the so-called Arab Spring uprisings (not to mention, again, the fallout of the 1990s breakdown of socialist governments in Europe), is something that the United Nation's High Commission on Refugees has regularly criticised.[25]

Yet at the same time, it would be difficult to argue that there has been no coordination: the level of investment, policy development, legal changes, technological development for surveillance and control, and planning that has gone into the management of the European Union's borders is if anything a far bigger undertaking than the exchange of populations in the 1920s. The two key differences between the earlier period and the current one are: first, that all of the recent measures have been designed to keep the now illegal newcomers out, not

[24] Greece has been repeatedly criticised by international agencies for its failure to provide adequate treatment or facilities for asylum seekers and refugees. See, for example, http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/10/26/greece-immigration-un-idAFLDE69P1VV20101026, last accessed 10 October 2015.

[25] http://www.unhcr.org/561227536.html , last accessed 9.10.2015.

to move people from one place to another; and second, the new measures are permanent fixtures, they are not intended as a temporary measure to deal with an unusual situation. The policies were designed to ensure that the EU's outer borders remained more or less impermeable. They were not designed to allow people in.

As the summer of 2015 drew on, the numbers, already thought for several years to be 'way too high' for Greece to cope, became, according to the news reports, overwhelming. From the perspective of the UNHCR and a number of other agencies attempting to deal with the situation, this was avoidable: had there been a transnational will to set up a legal means for people to safely flee the places in which their lives and livelihoods were in danger, or already destroyed, and to relocate safely elsewhere, then the highly disorganized, dangerous and expensive trips made illegally, both across the Mediterranean and overland, would not have occurred. In the views of many who have been commenting on the political and economic conditions of the contemporary moment, this is just one symptom of policies that are designed to allow the free flow of trade, capital, people and resources in line with neoliberal ideals, but which has strongly restricted anything that runs counter to that, in an ongoing battle, just about everywhere in the world (and in anthropology, Chris Gregory and David Graeber are two of the better known observers who would see it that way).[26] From this perspective, this particular political and economic geopolitical logic has created multiple regions in the world where life has become so harsh, either because of ongoing violent conflicts or because of extreme lack of resources or opportunities, that people are driven out to look for something else, some way to survive. Many of them head for Europe. And what they are confronted with is a highly intricate border control regime that was designed to keep them out. And as a result of particularly harsh controls in certain entry points into the EU, the vast majority of undocumented people trying to enter the EU from these troubled places have

[26] Graeber (2011b); Gregory (1997).

now been trying to enter through Greece. And the majority of those people end up in Athens, one way or another, at least for a time. As in the 1920s, the sheer numbers of migrants, with radically insufficient structures and resources to handle them, has made it feel like a crisis, piled up on top of the financial crisis. And the media helps to encourage that sense, reporting it as a crisis within a crisis.

Here, Roitman's short book on the concept of 'crisis' is worth exploring in a little more detail. Roitman (2014) argues that the work that the concept does is threefold. First, the idea of crisis places events in historical time: 'crisis' breaks up everyday life by asserting that what is happening now is something different, something that is not normal, and something that creates a rupture. Second, 'crisis' provides a means to morally judge events, to argue that something is revealed by this moment of crisis that was not so visible before (e.g. the raw brutality of neoliberal capitalism). In that way, crisis becomes a platform for mobilising political action in response to the crisis. However, Roitman suggests, if you have to rely on the self-evidence of crisis in order to combat it, then you can only have 'anti-crisis' (something to be against), rather than crisis and 'something else', something positive that could replace crisis (Roitman 2014: 91). Third, and in contrast, crisis also provides a means to render things actually *anti*-political: crisis is an unnatural or abnormal state of affairs, contrasted to what is normal, and so it is conceptually conservative, seeking a return rather than something different. In order to get back to 'normal life,' the natural order of things, you have to stop trying to make political points, and instead do something to restore normal order.

While this call for a non-foundational understanding of political action makes sense, there is something about the concept of crisis in the case of Athens that Roitman's account somewhat sidesteps, and that is the question of scale. The implication of Roitman's argument is that crisis is one of those conditions that is understood to occur at a scale beyond the local, both in its causes, and in its effects. Crisis not only hurts the 'man in the street'; it sends out

waves of effects to other parts of the world, and it is also created by waves of effects from other parts of the world. It is also considerably bigger than the things that happen to people individually. It is a 'crisis' because it affects many hundreds of thousands of people all at once, and sometimes, millions of people. The kind of crisis Roitman is discussing, which is in fact aimed at understanding the concept in terms of 'financial crisis' in the USA, is not simply a personal crisis, one that any individual may experience in their lives as a result of particular personal events or relations; it is a crisis that generates a domino effect, a crisis of global proportions.

That captures something of the situation in Athens in the period since 2009; but there is another element of scale that is not quite captured by Roitman's analysis, and that is the sense of the *overwhelming* character of what is occurring. Overwhelming both because the events appear to be relentless and have no clear end in sight; and because there is such an enormous gap between these events and anybody's capacity to deal with them. It goes off the scale. It is hard to capture in words that peculiar sense of enormity that people expressed to me, both in Athens and on the island of Lesvos during July of 2015: it was a period during which arrivals of refugees on the island was at its most intense. At the same time, the Greek banks were closed temporarily to prevent a bank run because of uncertainty of the outcome of the referendum held on July 5th, which asked the Greek voters to decide on whether the Greek government should accept a new austerity package from the Eurogroup, in return for more funds to help stave off default on repayment of existing loans. The whole series of events felt too large. Corsín-Jiménez (2008) captures something of that sense of disproportion in his discussion of the sense of stress, anger and helplessness of Spanish academics who were being asked to become 'knowledge managers' in the 'knowledge economy' while being given none of the resources needed to achieve that, and at the same time being constantly audited for their failure to achieve it. In Athens, the sense of overwhelming enormity of the gap

between what is possible and what is required – demanded, even – both in the case of the refugees and in the case of the Greek economic situation, was what made people feel that 'crisis' was the appropriate description of what was occurring. It had also become the new normal, of course; the fiscal 'crisis' has been going on since 2009 (the financial crisis began somewhat earlier), and the refugee/migration 'crisis' has been going on since the 1990s. Marianne Ferme, in her ethnographic analysis of Sierra Leone, describes how common it is, these days, for the abnormal to be the new normal – or 'normally abnormal' – as she would put it (Ferme 2001). This is not so much an evocation of Agamben's 'state of exception' as it is a sense that things ought not to be this way, but they are anyway, and are likely to stay that way for the foreseeable future. Crisis as a rupture, yes; but one that generates a new normal, rather than a return.

To gain a sense of this development of disproportion, it is worth going back just a few years, to 2008. It was different in Athens in 2008, just before the fiscal collapse of the Greek government changed things dramatically. In Sintagma Square in August of that year, the city police officers were the ones who dealt with the undocumented migrants. They were dressed like police as well, in dark blue trousers and light blue cotton shirts, rather than dressing in black in bullet proof jackets, with weapons and, often, crash helmets, as they are dressed today. In 2008, the undocmented traders would put out their stalls to sell their goods - handbags, umbrellas, children's toys, cigarette lighters, household crockery and cutlery, all kinds of things – right there in Syntagma Square, right in front of the Greek parliament buildings. And the Athenians would browse these stalls, looking to see if there was anything interesting in amongst all these things that were made in China and arrived into the hands of the migrants, who were not from China, by mysterious routes. Then the police, in their blue shirts and dark blue trousers, would arrive, the traders would pack up within 20 seconds and

run away at high speed. When the police were gone, the traders would come back, and the whole thing would be repeated again in a little while when the police patrol returned.

It is hard to remember Syntagma Square in that way now. Omonia Square, located in a less wealthy and part of central Athens and with a past history of being a red light district, was a little harsher, there were already quite a few tensions developing there, and in Exarheia too, the area in which many students and artists have often frequented. But the harshness with which the military-styled police now deal with the issue is something else again: an order of magnitude different from the earlier period to such a degree that it has become a different kind of phenomenon. The cat and mouse game of 2008 allowed a mutual recognition that everyone involved had a job to do: the police had to keep order on the streets, the traders had to try and fit themselves in between the policemen's rounds. The dynamic in more recent years seems to be based on no recognition at all: the perceived sheer scale of the problem has made it impossible, it seems, to see any of the people involved in it as *people*. They are migrants or they are police, and neither category appears to recognize the other one as anything other than a category. A far cry from the situation in the 1960s, in which the concept of 'migrant' did not really exist at all. Now there are people on the streets of Athens who are nothing but that category.

Everyone knows it is not only the police who are confronting the more recent migrants. Members of Golden Dawn are out on patrol regularly, wearing their uniforms that echo and borrow from the military style of past dictatorships. They go out in order to defend Greece and the Greeks, they say; they go out in order to 'sort out' the migrants, as an act of patriotism. Except for their tendency to valorize violence, they provide an echo of Harel Shapira's account of the Minutemen of Arizona in *Waiting for José* (Shapira 2013). The Minutemen (named after the men who needed to be ready in a minute to defend America in the earlier period of that country's history) are patrolling the US-Mexican border on behalf of

their country, they say. The Minutemen (some of whom are actually women) are unpaid, unofficial, and their aim is to stop migrants from crossing into the United States. Shapira points out in his ethnography that many of the Minutemen are much like the rest of the population in their political and social views; the difference is not nearly as sharp as some would like to believe. A similar point was made by Douglas Holmes about the growth of the far right in Italy, in his book, *Integral Europe* (Holmes 2000). The reasons that some of the police, border guards and general population end up being harshly prejudiced against people who have left deeply troubled parts of the world and come to Europe in search of something better, is not a straightforward matter. Work like that of Shapira and Holmes demonstrates that it actually quite difficult to disentangle many of their values and sentiments from their harshest opponents sometimes. Edward Said suggested a long time ago that many ideologies have a tendency to avoid confronting the negative, dark, side of ourselves by ascribing those characteristics to others, to the ones we can legitimately condemn for being in some way lacking, most especially in terms of values and decency (Said 1991). Of course, prejudice and bigotry should be challenged whenever and wherever possible, most especially when those sentiments are directed against a category (migrant) that has only been recently legally implemented in Greece, and in which the presence of people on the streets of Athens who fit that category is also the outcome of years of political, legal and technological arrangements to make it so. But there is an equal responsibility to examine whether elements of that prejudice reappear in the *way* that the bigotry is challenged. It is a knotty issue.

Besides the battles going on in the streets and in the 'no-go' areas of Athens, the areas that 'decent people' would never go, there are also other places where migrants can be found, behind closed doors and away from the gaze of the heavily armed police. Prominent amongst these people are care workers of all kinds working in the homes of the people who possess

more money than time.[27] Those migrants are protected by their patrons, some say; others say they are something between prisoners and slaves, having replaced their own family and home for somebody else's, in the hopes of sending money back and making things better for the next generation. Those people might get out on a Sunday afternoon, to breath a little in the park, but not always. They are an invisible small army, keeping things going in Athens, despite everything else apparently falling to pieces. In focusing on what happens in the streets between border guards and migrants, these less eye-catching aspects of the new arrivals to Athens should not be forgotten.

Concluding remarks

There are three main points about that this brief sketch of changes in the status of foreigners in Athens has tried to make. First: it is not the first time there has been the sudden arrival of large numbers of people from elsewhere in this city. However, it is the first time that people legally defined as refugees and migrants have arrived in large numbers. What this points towards is that both in the past and in the present, particular forms of relations and separations with other parts of the world are as important in understand what is going on with newcomers to Athens as studying the events in Athens itself. Without understanding the fundamentally transnational character of this place, it would be difficult to make sense of what is happening.

Second, one distinctive aspect of the migration in its most recent iteration is the way it is strongly tied to legal and technical changes made in relation to border management of the European Union region. That process, which has a variety of political and economic motivations and logic behind it, has been having the effect of quite radically rearranging the relation between people and place, and that can be seen particularly acutely in Athens just at

[27] Lyberaki (2011)

the moment. As Bridget Anderson has noted in her study of migration policies in the UK, this not only involves a deeply ideological debate about the moral status of migrants; it also involves a deeply ideological debate about the moral status of citizens more generally (Anderson 2013). In the UK, Anderson argues, the definition of a morally upstanding citizen closely matched the economic needs of the UK economy, so that anyone who was not appropriate – whether they were a foreigner or not – was morally corrupt and therefore a member of the undeserving poor. Anderson effectively questions the significance of the national border here, suggesting that the division between a migrant and a citizen who is defined as undeserving is almost no difference at all. The policies of the UK government suggest that in both cases, the aim was the same.

What is intriguing about that kind of rhetoric in terms of what is currently going on in Greece is that both European politicians and the media often write about the entirety of Greece and the Greek population as being members of a morally unacceptable group: people who do not pay their debts, who do not work hard enough, who do not work by the rules. During the debates about the restructuring of Greek debt by the Eurogroup in the summer of 2015, the question of whether the new government under Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras could be trusted was constantly raised as a 'blockage' in coming to agreement.[28] Here, the always already transnational connections and disconnections between Athens and other places becomes acutely visible.

Third, the overwhelming disproportion of what has been occurring in Athens in recent years is an important element in its experience by people as a 'crisis'. It is not so much the idea of abnormality (though that is present); it is the enormity of the gap between the events as they are unfolding in people's lives and the capacity to deal with them. And that gap is not

[28] http://www.theguardian.com/business/2015/jul/12/greek-crisis-surrender-fiscal-sovereignty-in-return-for-bailout-merkel-tells-tsipras last accessed October 10 2015.

simply a matter of imagining either global forces or the sudden occurrence of unnatural disasters as Roitman describes. It is also a perceived unbridgeable gap between what people in the city understand is going on and how it is possible to deal with it, and what those who have a transnational stake in deciding what will happen next in Athens, imagine is possible. The situation is disproportionate, as Corsín Jiménez notes (Corsín Jiménez 2008).

References

Anderson, Bridget. 2013. *Us and them? The dangerous politics of immigration control*.

Andersson, Ruben. 2014. *Illegality, inc.: clandestine migration and the business of bordering Europe*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

Armstrong, Gary. 1998. *Football hooligans: knowing the score*. Oxford: Berg.

Bakalaki, Alexandra. 2003. "Locked into Security, Keyed into Modernity: the selection of burglaries as source of risk in Greece." *Ethnos,* 68:2, 209-229.

Baldwin-Edwards, M. 1997. "The emerging European immigration regime: Some reflections on implications for southern Europe." *Journal of Common Market Studies,* 35:4, 497-519.

Bastéa, Eleni. 2000. *The creation of modern Athens: planning the myth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Clogg, Richard. 1986. *A short history of modern Greece*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.

—. 1992. *A Concise History of Greece*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Corsín Jiménez, Alberto. 2008. "Relations and disproportions: The labor of scholarship in the knowledge economy." *American Ethnologist,* 35:2, 229-242.

Faubion, James D. 1993. *Modern Greek lessons: a primer in historical constructivism*. Princeton, N.J.; Chichester: Princeton University Press.

Ferme, Mariane C. 2001. *The underneath of things: violence, history, and the everyday in Sierra Leone*. Berkeley, Calif.; London: University of California Press.

Gourgouris, Stathis. 1996. *Dream Nation: Enlightenment, Colonization, and the Institution of Modern Greece*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Graeber, D. 2011a. "Consumption." *Current Anthropology,* 52:4, 489-512.

Graeber, David. 2011b. *Debt: the first 5,000 years*. New York: Melville House.

Green, S. 2010. "Performing Border in the Aegean." *Journal of Cultural Economy,* 3:2, 261-278.

Green, Sarah. 2005. *Notes from the Balkans: locating marginality and ambiguity on the Greek-Albanian border*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Gregory, C. A. 1997. *Savage money: the anthropology and politics of commodity exchange*. Amsterdam; London: Harwood Academic Publishers.

Herzfeld, Michael. 1986. *Ours Once More: Folklore, Ideology, and the Making of Modern Greece*. New York: Pella Publishing Inc.

—. 1991. *A Place in History: Social and Monumental Time in a Cretan Town*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

—. 1992. *The Social Production of Indifference: Exploring the Symbolic Roots of Western Bureaucracy*. Oxford: Berg.

Hirschon, Renée. 1989. *Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe: The Social Life of Asia Minor Refugees in Piraeus*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

—. 2003. "'Unmixing peoples' in the Aegean region." In *Crossing the Aegean: an appraisal of the 1923 compulsory population exchange between Greece and Turkey,* edited by Renée Hirschon, 3-12. New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books.
Holmes, Douglas, R. 2000. *Integral Europe: fast-capitalism, multiculturalism, neofascism*. Princeton, N.J.; Oxford: Princeton University Press.
Karyotis, G. 2012. "Securitization of Migration in Greece: Process, Motives, and Implications." *International Political Sociology,* 6:4, 390-408.
Karyotis, G. and S. Patrikios. 2010. "Religion, securitization and anti-immigration attitudes: The case of Greece." *Journal of Peace Research,* 47:1, 43-57.
Lyberaki, A. 2011. "Migrant Women, Care Work, and Women' S Employment in Greece." *Feminist Economics,* 17:3, 103-131.
Reeves, M. 2013. "Clean fake: Authenticating documents and persons in migrant Moscow." *American Ethnologist,* 40:3, 508-524.
Roitman, Janet L. 2014. *Anti-crisis*. Durham: Duke University Press.
Said, Edward W. 1991. *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
Samatas, M. 2003. "Greece in 'Schengenland': blessing or anathema for citizens' and foreigners' rights?" *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies,* 29:1, 141-156.
Shapira, Harel. 2013. *Waiting for José: the Minutemen's pursuit of America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Strathern, Marilyn. 1992. *After Nature: English kinship in the late twentieth century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Swarts, J. and N. M. Karakatsanis. 2012. "The Securitization of Migration: Greece in the 1990s." *Journal of Balkan and near Eastern Studies,* 14:1, 33-51.
—. 2013. "Challenges to Desecuritizing Migration in Greece." *Journal of Balkan and near Eastern Studies,* 15:1, 97-120.
Triandafyllidou, A. 2009. "Greek Immigration Policy at the Turn of the 21st Century. Lack of Political Will or Purposeful Mismanagement?" *European Journal of Migration and Law,* 11:2, 159-177.
Yalouri, Eleana. 2001. *The Acropolis: global fame, local claim*. Oxford ; New York: Berg.